

WASHINGTON, DC - Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (MD) spoke on the House Floor today in support of legislation to allow for repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

"This May, the House approved the repeal of our Armed Forces' policy of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,' by a vote of 234-194, during consideration of the Defense Authorization bill. We voted to end an outdated policy that damages our national security—pending a comprehensive Defense Department report that would review the issues associated with implementing repeal and study our troops' attitudes toward open service for gays and lesbians.

"That report was released on November 30. It included an exhaustive survey of the views of more than 115,000 service members and came to an unambiguous conclusion: 'The risk of repeal to overall military effectiveness is low.'

"Our troops stand with our military leaders and the vast majority of Americans in calling for repeal. The majority of them would be baffled by the fear with which some of my colleagues tar them every time 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' is discussed.

"Some say that our troops are afraid to serve with gays and lesbians. Yet 92% of them who have done so called the experience very good, good, or neutral. And 70% of service members believe that serving beside an openly gay colleague would have positive, mixed, or no effect on unit cohesion. There are surely countless stories like that of a special operations fighter who said: 'We have a gay guy [in the unit]. He's big, he's mean, and he kills lots of bad guys. No one cared that he was gay.'

"Despite all of this, the Senate has failed to pass a Defense Authorization bill including repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.' As a result, this separate bill for repeal has been brought to the floor of both the House and Senate.

"Why is it so important that we pass it? Above all, we must pass this bill because our choice is between a thoughtful, responsible repeal plan, developed over months of study—or a sudden, disruptive repeal imposed by the courts. Our military leaders understand that the courts are

likely to overturn 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' soon—and that is exactly why they are urging Congress to pass a legislative solution instead.

"Admiral Mullen, who supports repeal, wants it to come 'through the same process with which the law was enacted rather than precipitously through the courts.'

"And as Secretary Gates put it, 'Given the present circumstances, those that choose not to act legislatively are rolling the dice that this policy will not be abruptly overturned by the courts.'

"That's a hard choice to understand when it comes from those who argue that the wellbeing of our military is the foremost consideration in their minds.

"Passing this repeal bill is the wise, responsible choice for America's military. But more than that, Mr. Speaker, it's time to end a policy of official discrimination that has cost America the service of some 13,500 men and women who wore our uniform with honor. It's time to stop throwing away their service—their willingness to die for our country—because of who they are.

"And it's time to end a culture of institutionalized lying, forced on military men and women who are taught to tell the truth in all other things. They deserve better.

"One of those young men who deserve better is a constituent named Ian Goldin. He wrote me an eloquent letter, and I want to close with his words.

"Congressman Hoyer...I joined the Army Reserves Officer Training Corps last year after President Obama reaffirmed his campaign pledge to end 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'....I've always known that I wanted to serve my country in the Armed Forces, but one thing was always holding me back: I'm gay.

"I've been open about that part of my life since high school, and I was not willing to go back into the closet. But after the President promised to end DADT, I decided to finally join ROTC,

hopeful that I would not have to hide my sexuality for long....I quickly realized that I had made the right choice—although I was a new recruit, I was already in the top of my class of Cadet Privates First Class in land navigation....

"But it became increasingly difficult to hide such an important part of who I am. And after learning about the continual delays in Congress...I decided I needed to quit ROTC until the ban was fully repealed. I've spent this past semester studying abroad in Amman, Jordan, and I will spend next semester in Cairo. I have invaluable experience abroad. I'm an advanced Arabic speaker. I'm an 'A' student at a top national university....

"Most importantly, I want to serve my country. When I can serve openly, I will finish ROTC and be commissioned as an officer in the US Army. And there are many others like me—I've met them. So please, do whatever you can to repeal DADT."